ways of the world, but not worldly. Her personality was very attractive; she had a good form, an agreeabile face, speaking gray eyes and brown hair, soft and naturally wavy. She was a distant cousin of Ethel's mother, but had been brought up with her in the same household and always regarded her as a sister, and Ethel never remembered that she was only her aunt by adoption. Ten years older then her niece, she had mothered her with a wise and loving patience, and her thoughts never wandered long or far from the girl. Consequently, she soon found herself wondering what reason there could be for Dora Denning's urgency.

In the meantime Ethel had reached her friend's residence—a new building of unusual size and very ornate architecture. Liveried footmen and waiting women bowed her with mute attention to Miss Denning's suite, an absolutely private arrangement of five rooms, marvelously furnished for the young lady's comfort and delight. The windows of her parlor overlooked the park, and she was standing at one of them as Ethel entered the room. In a passion of welcoming gladness she turned to her, exclaiming: "I have been watching for you hours and hours, Ethel. I have the most wonderful thing to tell you. I am so happy! So happy! No one was ever as happy as I am."

Then Ethel took both her hands, and as they stood together she looked intently at her friend. Some new charm transfigured her face, for her dark, gazelle eyes were not more lambent than her cheeks, though in a different way, while her black hair, in its picturesquely arranged disorder, seemed instinct with life and hardly to be restrained. She was constantly pushing it back, caressing or arranging it; and her white, slender fingers, sparkling with jewels, moved among the crimped and wavy locks as if there was an intelligent sympathey between them.

"How beautiful you are to-day, Dora! Who has worked wonders on you?"

"Basil Stanhope. He loves me! He loves me! He told me so last night—in the sweetest words that were ever uttered. I shall never forget one of them—never, as long as I live! Let us sit down. I want to tell you everything."

"I am astonished, Dora!"

"So was mother and father and Bryce. No one suspected our affection. Mother used to grumble about my going 'at all hours' to St. Jude's Church; but that was because St. Jude's is so very High Church, and mother is a Methodist Episcopal. It was the morning and evening prayers she objected to. No one had any suspicion of the clergyman. Oh, Ethel, he is so handsome! So good! So clever! I think every woman in the church is in love with him."

"Then, if he is a good man, he must be very unhappy."

"Of course, he is quite ignorant of their admiration, and therefore quite innocent. I am the only woman he loves, and he never even remembers me when he is in the sacred office. If you could see him come out of the vestry in his white surplice, with his rapt face and prophetic eyes. So mystical! So beautiful! You would not wonder that I worship him."

"But I do not understand; how did you meet him socially?"

"I met him at Mrs. Taylor's first. Then he spoke to me one morning as I came out of church, and the next morning he walked through the park with me. And after that—all was easy enough."

"I see. What do your father and mother think—or rather, what do they say?"

"Father always says what he thinks, and mother thinks and says what I do. This condition simplified matters very much. Basil wrote to father, and yesterday, after dinner, he had an interview with him. I expected it and was quite prepared for any climax that might come. I wore my loveliest white frock and had lilies of the valley in my hair and on my breast; and father called me 'his little angel' and piously wondered 'how I could be his daughter.' All dinner time I tried to be angelic, and after dinner I sang 'Little Boy Blue' and some of the songs he loves; and I felt, when Basil's card came in, that I had prepared the proper atmosphere for the interview."

"You are really very clever, Dora."

"I tried to continue singing and playing, but I could not; the notes all ran together, the words were lost. I went to mother's side and put my hand in hers, and she said softly: 'I can hear your father storming a little, but he will settle down the quicker for it. I dare say he will bring Mr. Stanhope in here before long."

"Did he?"

"No. That was Bryce's fault. How Bryce happened to be in the house at that hour, I cannot imagine; but it seems to be natural for him to drop into any interview where he can make trouble. However, it turned out all for the best, for when mother heard Bryce's voice above all the other sounds, she said: 'Come, Dora, we shall have to interfere now.' Then I was delighted. I was angelically dressed, and I felt equal to the interview."

"Do you really mean that you joined the three quarreling men?"

"Of course. Mother was quite calm—calm enough to freeze a tempest—but she gave father a look he comprehended. Then she shook hands with Basil and would have made some remark to Bryce, but with his usual impertinence he took the initiative, and told her very authoritatively to 'retire and take me with her'—calling me that 'demure little flirt' in a tone that was very offensive. You schould have seen father blaze into anger at his words. He told Bryce to remember that 'Mr. Ben Denning owned the house, and that Bryce had four or five rooms in it by his courtesy.' He said also that the 'ladies present were Mr. Ben Denning's wife and daughter, and that it was impertient in him to order them out of his parlor, where they were always welcome.' Bryce was white with passion, but he answered in his affected way: 'Sir, that sly girl, with her pretended piety and her sneak of a lover, is my sister, and I shall not permit her to disgrace my family without making a protest.'"

"And then?"

"I began to cry, and I put my arms around father's neck and said he must defend me; that I was not 'sly' and Basil was not 'a sneak,' and father kissed me and said he would settle with any man and every man who presumed to call me either sly or a flirt."

"I think Mr. Denning acted beautifully. What did Bryce say?"

"He turned to Basil and said: 'Mr. Stanhope, if you are not a cad, you will leave the house. You have no right to intrude yourself into family affairs and family quarrels.' Basil had seated mother and was standing with one hand on the back of her chair, and he did not answer Bryce. There was no need—father answered quick enough. He said Mr. Stanhope had asked to become one of the family, and for his part he would welcome him freely; and then he asked mother if she was of his mind, and mother smiled and reached her hand backward to Basil. Then father kissed me again, and somehow Basil's arm was around me, and I know I looked lovely, —almost like a bride! Oh, Ethel, it was just heavenly!"

"I am sure it was. Did Bryce leave the room then?"

"Yes; he went out in a passion, declaring he would never notice me again. This morning at breakfast I said I was sorry Bryce felt so hurt, but father was sure Bryce would find plenty of consolation in the fact that his disapproval of my choice would excuse him from giving me a wedding present. You know Bryce is a mean little miser!"

"On the contrary, I thought he was very luxurious and extravagant."

"Where Bryce is concerned, yes; toward everyone else his conduct is too mean to consider. Why, father makes him an allowance of $20,000 a year, and he empties father's cigar boxes whenever he can do so without—"

"Let us talk about Mr. Stanhope—he is far more interesting. When are you going to marry him?"

"In the spring. Father is going to give me some money and I have the fortune Grandmother Cahill left me. It has been well invested, and father told me this morning I was a fairly rich little woman. Basil has some private fortune, also his stipend—we shall do very well. Basil's family is one of the finest among the old Boston aristocrats and he is closely connected with the English Stanhopes, who rank with the greatest of the nobility."

"I wish Americans would learn to rely on their own nobility. I am tired of their everlasting attempts to graft on some English noble family. No matter how great or clever a man may be, you are sure to read if his descent from some Scottish chief or English earl."

"They can't help their descent, Ethel."

"They need not pin all they have done on to it. Often father frets me in the same way. If he wins a difficult case, he does it naturally, because he is a Rawdon. He is handsome, gentlemanly, honorable, even a perfect horseman, all because, being a Rawdon, he was by nature and inheritance compelled to such perfection. It is very provoking, Dora, and if I were you I would not allow Basil to begin a song about 'the English Stanhopes.' Aunt Ruth and I get very tired often of the English Rawdons, and are really thankful for the separating Atlantic."

"I don't think I shall feel in that way, Ethel. I like the nobility; so does father, he says the Dennings are a fine old family."

"Why talk of genealogies when there is such a man as Basil Stanhope to consider? Let us grant him perfection and agree that he is to marry you in the Spring; well then, there is the ceremony, and the wedding garments! Of course it is to be a church wedding?"

"We shall be married in Basil's own church. I can hardly eat or sleep for thinking of the joy and the triumph of it! There will be women there ready to eat their hearts with envy—I believe indeed, Ethel, that every woman in the church is in love with Basil."

"You have said that before, and I am sure you are wrong. A great many of them are married, and are in love with their own husbands; and the kind of girls who go to St. Jude's are not the kind who marry clergymen. Mr. Stanhope's whole income would hardly buy their gloves and parasols."

"I don't think you are pleased that I am going to marry. You must not be jealous of Basil. I shall love you just the same."

"Under no conditions, Dora, would I allow jealousy to trouble my life. All the same, you will not love me after your marriage as you have loved me in the past. I shall not expect it."

Passionate denials of this assertion, reminiscences of the past, assuranecs for the future followed, and Ethel accepted them without dispute and without faith. But she understood that the mere circumstances of her engagement was all that Dora could manage at present; and that the details of the marriage merged themselves constantly in the wonderful fact that Basil Stanhope loved her, and that some time, not far off, she was going to be his wife. This joyful certainty filled her heart and her comprehension, and she had a natural reluctance to subject it to the details of the social and religious ceremonies necessary. Such things permitted others to participate in her joy, and she resented the idea. For a time she wished to keep her lover in a world where no other thought might trouble the thought of Dora.

Ethel understood her friends's mood, and was rather relieved when her carriage arrived. She felt that her presence was preventing Dora's absolute surrender of herself to thoughts of her lover, and all the way home she marveled at the girl's infatuation, and wondered if it would be possible for her to fall into such a dotage of love for any man. She answered this query positively—"No, if I should lose my heart, I shall not therefore lose my head"—and then, before she could finish assuring herself of her determinate wisdom, some mocking lines she had often quoted to love-sick girls went laughing through her memory —

"O Woman! Woman! Oh! our frail, frail sex!
No wonder tragedies are made from us!
Always the same—nothing but loves and cradles."

She found Ruth Bayard dressed for dinner, but her father was not present. That was satisfactory, for he was always a little impatient when the talk was of lovers and weddings; and just then this topic was uppermost in Ethel's mind.

"Ruth," she said, "Dora is engaged," and then in a few sentences she told the little romance Dora had lived for the past year.